

SPOKEN ANIMAL (aka Animal Tales)

ENGL 261.601 / Jason Zuzga / Tues 6-9:00 pm / Spring 2015
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From Aesop to Kafka, why do we long to be able to share and verbalize the experiences of non-speaking animals? We will interrogate a number of novels, stories, films, and cultural to see what might be the motivations, as well as the difficulties, in doing so. Our investigation of film will focus our research and discussion on textual narratives from the "Point of View" of animals themselves, such as the harrowing "First-person" account of the "afterlife" of a chimney-sweep turned into a kind of amphibian in Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies*. As well, we will visit the harrowing human-authored life of an elephant in Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone*, narratives of ecosystems (*Life and Death of a Salt Marsh*) and legal cases in which the matter of the animal or plant might have formal standing. Students will be required to discuss challenging materials in a variety of media, and to complete a research project – the format is open -- on human-animal relations, in consultation with the instructor.

Assignments:

- 1) Every-other-week journal from point of view of an animal.
- 2) Weekly approx. 250 word "close viewing" or "close reading" responses responding to the questions provided in the syllabus -- rough only, please - focusing on a particular scene or passage. Please upload these to the class facebook page.
- 3) One 15- page research paper or creative research-based project that performs an extended close reading of a particularly intriguing and ambiguous moment in a piece of writing or film, drawing on other materials. This might be a film, an audio piece, a performance, an installation. You must turn in an annotated bibliography including five scholarly sources with an explanation of how the source is relevant to the development of your project.
- 4) Active and enthusiastic class participation.
- 5) Short take-home midterm and take-home final exam.
- 6) Participation in discussion on the course facebook page, links to relevant sites, videos, and so forth. You should also use the facebook page to arrange group viewings of films, general procedural questions, etc.

Books required: (Available for purchase at Penn Book Center)

The White Bone by Barbara Gowdy
My Dog Tulip by J. R. Ackerley
Animals in Translation by Temple Grandin
Flush by Virginia Woolf
The Lives of Animals by J. M. Coetzee

No e-books allowed and no electronic devices to be used during classtime except when explicitly allowed by instructor. Please print out material from Canvas and bring to class. Please write on your documents.

INTRODUCTIONS AND VISIONS OF ANIMALS IN THE MOVING IMAGE

January 21

stories of animals from lives of students,
explanation of the procedures of the classroom.

Watch a sampling of short films:

~Gertie the Dinosaur (Dir. Winsor McCay, 1914)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGXC8gXOPoU>

~Le Vampire (Dir. Jean Painleve, 1945)

<http://vimeo.com/7614241>

~L'hippocampe (Dir. Jean Painleve, 1934)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNrFeL4i19g>

~Love Life of the Octopus (Dir. Jean Painleve, 1967)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzclhRnlC08>

~excerpts about the Reed Lemur from episode of BBC documentary about Madagascar

Read excerpt from Darwin on worms. (Handout)

Read definition of "nature" by Raymond Williams. (Handout)

Questions: What kind of creature is the cinematic creature, the animal on screen? How does one relate to such an animal? We will be paying close attention throughout the semester to the various ways animal "subjectivity" is portrayed and how different media allow and encourage various modes of attention and imaginative relations. Above all, we will be focused on the question of language and whether "language" is what separates humans from animals. Most of the works we will read involve entering the world of the animals – can we do this in language?

WE PRIMATES: THE GORILLA, THE CHIMPANZEE, THE ORANGUTANG & HOMO SAPIENS

January 28

To have completed before class:

View ***Koko: A Talking Gorilla (Dir. Barbet Schroeder, 1977)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GehehDz_7-4

follow through youtube and watch 1-8

Read excerpt from The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals – Charles Darwin (in

FILES)

Poe, "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (in FILES)

Kafka, "A Report to an Academy" (in FILES)

Rousseau, The Origin of Language (in FILES)

<http://www.projetogap.org.br/en/> (read extensively through this website)

All the King Kongs (OPTIONAL – you won't have time, of course, to view even one given the workload this week, but consider them as a research project possibility – we may get to excerpts from them in class – consider all works listed as "Optional" on this syllabus as possibilities for research projects, as well as all "required" works – everything listed is required unless marked "optional".)

Questions: How slippery is the division between the human and the animal in these works? What is the importance and status of language in these works – both in the works themselves and in the content or ideas expressed by these works? And the same for image? Does the possession of language render any being "human?"

BECOMING THE ANIMAL

February 4

"What it is like to be a Bat" by Thomas Nagel (IN FILES)

A Foray into the Worlds of Humans and Animals by Jakob von Uexkill (excerpt) (IN FILES)

"The Metamorphosis" by Franz Kafka (IN FILES)

Three Thousand Years Among the Microbes Mark Twain

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/143383916/Three-Thousand-Years-Among-the-Microbes-Mark-Twain-1905>

Mothlight (Dir. Stan Brakhage 1963)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaGh0D2NXCA>

Questions: According to these works, is it possible for a HUMAN to tell a story from the point of view of a non-human animal. Do these works draw any significant line separating those two categories? If so, how? If not, why? How might you talk about the experience of Mothlight and the end of The Metamorphosis that compares and contrasts them? What might they, conceptually, have in common?

BECOMING THE ANIMAL, LANGUAGE & IMAGE

February 11

Temple Grandin, "Animals in Translation"

Au Hazard Balthazar (Dir. Robert Bresson 1966) http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00QROJ63A?ref_=imdbref_tt_wbr_aiv&tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_aiv-20

Questions: Would it be accurate to call what Temple Grandin does a kind of translation? What do we think about Grandin's main line of work in designing "humane" slaughter facilities?

THE ELEPHANT AND THE DISAPPEARING ANIMAL

February 18

The White Bone by Barbara Gowdy

“The Elephant Vanishes” by Haruki Murakami (handout) (Optional)

“Why Look at Animals” by John Berger (in FILES)

Question: Does the novel work to sustain a believable voice? Now the complex....how so? Why are we susceptible to believing in the existence of an elephant voice? What are the various reasons? How would this be different, or would it, from a novel written by a slime mold? And if in fact an elephant COULD communicate with other elephants, would such be translatable? How much is language rooted in the particular umwelt or particular body of those in communication?

DOMESTICATED COMPANION ANIMALS

February 25

Flush - Virginia Woolf

“The Companion-Animal Manifesto” by Donna Haraway (in FILES)

all Donna Haraway (in FILES)

Question: What changes when the narrator is a more familiar animal, a dog, vs. a wild animal? Are domestic animals reliable narrators? Do we “like” a domesticated animal narrator? Why or why not? Do we advocate putting dogs (or cats, or house-trained rabbits) in costumes, feeding them “human” food?

DOMESTICATED COMPANION ANIMALS II

March 4

My Dog Tulip by J. R. Ackerley

excerpt from The Open by Giorgio Agamben (handout)

Question: We are making a major swerve here. This text is clearly NOT told from the point of view of an animal. Or....is it? To what degree does Tulip examine and implicitly compare the human as an animal or blur any meaningful distinction between categories? What can we say here is left as a criterion to separate coherently the human from the animal?

ANIMALS IN MORE PERIL, ON THE MOVE

March 18

Watership Down by Richard Adams

Wacky Babies <https://archive.org/details/WackyBabies>

(Optional) Watership Down (Dir. Martin Rosen, 1977) http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00N8MCQRC?ref_=imdbref_tt_wbr_aiv&tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_aiv-20

Happy Feet

[http://www.amazon.com/dp/B000QI2ZWW?](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B000QI2ZWW?ref_=imdbref_tt_wbr_aiv&tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_aiv-20)

[ref_=imdbref_tt_wbr_aiv&tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_aiv-20](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B000QI2ZWW?ref_=imdbref_tt_wbr_aiv&tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_aiv-20)

March of the Penguins

[http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0014C3KSM?](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0014C3KSM?ref_=imdbref_tt_wbr_aiv&tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_aiv-20)

[ref_=imdbref_tt_wbr_aiv&tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_aiv-20](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0014C3KSM?ref_=imdbref_tt_wbr_aiv&tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_aiv-20)

Articles on "Cuteness"

Question: Along with Kafka, Richard Adams might be the most popular or well-known writer taking the point of view of the animal in language and narrative. Our task is to compare and contrast this work by Richard Adams to the works we have encountered thus far. Are this a book about animals, people, or both? How so, exactly. We will watch excerpts from the animated version books in class and compare to passages in the books. What changes in our relationship to the animals? What is disturbing or relevant about Wacky Babies, providing the animals with voices? Compare and contrast Happy Feet with March of the Penguins...

Animal POV

March 25

I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like (Dir. Bill Viola, 1986)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhv6dDRL-RI>

Kestrel's Eye (Dir. Mikael Kristersson 1998)

[http://www.amazon.com/Kestrels-Eye-Mikael-Kristersson/dp/B00DTFIB7W/](http://www.amazon.com/Kestrels-Eye-Mikael-Kristersson/dp/B00DTFIB7W/ref=tmm_aiv_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&sr=&qid=)

[ref=tmm_aiv_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&sr=&qid=](http://www.amazon.com/Kestrels-Eye-Mikael-Kristersson/dp/B00DTFIB7W/ref=tmm_aiv_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&sr=&qid=)

Donna Haraway on the "Cittercam" (IN FILES)

watch Cittercam video

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=cittercam+national+geographic

THE BIRDS

April 1

The Birds (Dir. Alfred Hitchcock 1963)
Lee Edelman on Hitchcock's The Birds (IN FILES)
Excerpt from Jacques Derrida (In FILES)

Follow up from previous week and preparation for next week – as well as a chance to go back and discuss and materials that presented difficulty previously. In class read through of some difficult passages from texts. Projects should be by this date discussed with instructor and have instructor approval – informal discussion of projects by individuals to class, collaborative support and discussion.

UNDERWATER EYES, UNDERWATER TEETH AND MINDS

April 8

Orca: The Killer Whale (Dir. Michael Anderson, 1977)
Jaws (Dir. Steven Spielberg, 1975)
"The Voice of the Dolphin" by Leo Szilard (In FILES)
"Cetacean Communication" by Gregory Bateson (in FILES)
excerpt from The Sounding of the Whale by D. Graham Burnett (in FILES)

Question: We've seen undersea life thus far. What makes the shark and the killer whale (or any whale) particularly privileged eyes in the sea? How do these films work to grant them subjectivity? What is the relationship between eye, mouth, and speed here?

THE LIVES OF ANIMALS

April 15

The Lives of Animals by J.M. Coetzee
Grizzly Man (Dir. Werner Herzog, 2005)

In class: Presentations on each of the essays in the book and careful reading of each.

Questions: How can we make any sense of what happened to Timothy Treadwell? Can the essays in the Coetzee book help us get a handle on the ethics of the actions of the people involved in the film and the film-within-the-film? Did Treadwell "speak for the bears?" In language? In image? What of the moment when Herzog asks Treadwell's friend to destroy the particular audio tape? Why do you think that might be the case?

ECOSYSTEM AS SUBJECT

April 22

Life of a Salt Marsh by John and Midred Teal (in FILES)

"Do Trees Have Standing?" by Christopher Stone (In FILES)

Questions: To what extent can an ecosystem "speak" or be spoken for? Do the Teals give a "voice" to a living place? Is the salt marsh a set of individuals? One complex individual? Also, we will try and understand Stone's argument and then transition, back to the beginning, to the question of the primate and primate rights at the end of class, reading about the decision in Spain to halt all testing and captivity on and of "higher" primates.

TRANSFORMATIONS ACROSS THE SPECIES LINE

April 29

The Waterbabies by Charles Kingsley (In Files)

Pig Tales by Marie Darrieussecq (In Files)

Cat People (Dir. Paul Schrader, 1982)

http://www.amazon.com/dp/B000ID37JA?ref_=imdbref_tt_wbr_aiv&tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_aiv-20

"Josephine the Singer" Franz Kafka (IN FILES)

Song of the Sea

Questions: These are all tales in which, like "The Metamorphosis," humans turn into animals. Are the voices in these works inherently human and of human concerns? Do they open on the "mind" of the animal or allow for any degree of empathy or are they merely using the animal to think through human concerns? Is that last option the most an animal tale might hope to do? Why or why not? Are we not already animals? Do animals have powers and potentialities that we lack and can learn from? Is it murder or a crime to kill or assault an animal that might also be a transformed human? How might we consider Josephine as an avatar of the human?